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Washington State Citizens Committee on Pipeline Safety

February 4, 2005

The Honorable Jeff Morris, Chair
House Technology, Energy & Communications Committee
244 John L. O'Brien Building
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

Dear Chairman Morris:

Re: Support of HB 1539 - Making it a crime to excavate without notification near a transmission pipeline

We would like to take this opportunity to tell you of this Committee's support of House Bill 1539, which is scheduled before your committee on Tuesday February 8th at 1:30 p.m.

For the past four years the Governor appointed Washington State Citizen Committee on Pipeline Safety has remained well informed and actively involved in pipeline safety issues throughout Washington State. This committee is unique in the entire nation, and we take our responsibility to provide advice to various pipeline safety stakeholders seriously.

Our committee has discussed many times the need for greater awareness and enforcement of this State's one number locator service laws. Damage to pipelines by third parties, including building and landscape contractors, other utilities, and residents, remains one of the most common sources of pipeline failures in the nation. In 2004 alone the federal Office of Pipeline Safety reports more than \$14,000,000 in property damage from third party incidents to pipelines. Not only does such damage cost money, it also puts public safety and environmental health at risk, and has led to huge economic disruptions that are not accounted for in the damage statistics.

Pending federal rules will soon require pipeline companies throughout Washington to expand their educational outreach to those who live and work near pipelines to increase their knowledge of how to safely coexist with the pipelines in their midst. This educational outreach is vital to reducing third party damage. Our committee also believes that the State has a responsibility to adequately enforce the one number locator law to send a clear message to those who choose to ignore this simple system thereby putting the public and environment at risk.

House Bill 1539, along with the increased educational efforts from the pipeline companies, is a needed step to better ensure public safety. For these reasons our committee has voted to support

Chairman Jeff Morris
HB 1539
February 4, 2005
Page 2 of 2

this bill, and ask that the Technology, Energy, and Communications Committee give this bill a “do pass” recommendation.

Sincerely,



Carl Weimer, Chair

cc. Sarah Dylag, Counsel